THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (c) Yes, Sir. Facilitation counters manned by ex-servicemen/NGOs have been set up in several Passport Offices. These facilitation counters provide services like sale of application forms, filling up forms at nominal charges and provision for photocopying documents. Tele-enquiry and web-based status check facilities are also available to the applicants to check the status of their application.

(d) The Government have taken various steps to speed up the issuance of passports and improve the functioning of passport offices. These steps are (i) proper scrutiny of the application form and the enclosed documents at the stage of submission of applications to avoid objections at later stages (ii) regular interaction with the police authorities to expedite police verification reports (iii) setting up facilitation counters in several passport offices (iv) opening of District Passport Cells in various districts in almost all the States with a view to bring the Passport services closer to the applicants and (v) Starting on-line registration of passport applications in some Passport Offices.

Amendment in Haj Act, 2002

4538. SHRI MUKHTAR ABBAS NAQVI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that some amendments were proposed in Haj Act, 2002 by the Haj Committee of India;

(b) if so, what are the amendments and Government's reaction thereon;

(c) whether it is also a fact that some bye-laws relating to Haj Act, 2002 were framed and proposed to Government by the Haj Committee of India for approval and acceptance; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The amendments to the Haj Committee Act, 2002 proposed by the Haj Committee of India in September 2004 related to extending the scope of the Act to include pilgrimage of Muslims, in addition to the Haj

pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, to other countries namely, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Jordan. As the Haj Committee Act, 2002 has specifically been enacted to establish a Haj Committee of India and State Haj Committees for making arrangement for the pilgrimage of Muslims for Haj and matters connected therewith, the proposed amendments are beyond the ambit of the Act.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) In terms of Section 45 of the Haj Committee Act, 2002, the Haj Committee of India has proposed Bye-laws covering a variety of issues, including powers and duties of Vice-Chairpersons; procedure regarding transaction of business at Haj Committee meetings; the membership, powers, functions and conduct of the Standing Committee meetings; membership, powers and functions of the sub-committees; publication of manuals; welfare of pilgrims; maintenance of records. These proposals are being examined in consultation with the Ministry of Law and Justice.

Setting up of Bangladesh Mission in India

4539. SHRIMATI SUKHBUNS KAUR. Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Bangladesh Government has proposed to set up a Bangladesh Mission in the North Eastern Region of India to help boost up trade between India and Bangladesh;

(b) if so, the details of the proposals made; and

(c) Government's response and reaction to this proposals?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E AHAMMED) (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Government of Bangladesh has requested setting up a Trade Mission in Guwahati

(c) Establishment of Trade Missions by foreign countries in North Eastern States is not covered within the ambit of current Government policy.

Bus service between Amritsar and Pakistan

4540. SHRI VARINDER SINGH BAJWA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state the progress made so far in starting a regular bus service from Amritsar to Nankana Sahib in Pakistan?